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PAUL OVERY

"THE WHOLE BAD TASTE OF OUR PERIOD:" JOSEF FRANK, ADOLF LOOS, AND "GSCHNAS"

PAUL OVERY HAS WRITTEN WIDELY ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY MODERNISM, INCLUDING BOOKS ON KANDINSKY, THE DE STIJL GROUP, AND THE ARCHITECTURE AND FURNITURE OF GERRIT RIETVELD. HE HAS CONTRIBUTED TO MANY ART, DESIGN, AND ARCHITECTURAL JOURNALS, AND REVIEWED REGULARLY FOR A NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS, INCLUDING *THE TIMES*. HE HAS LECTURED EXTENSIVELY ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND DESIGN AND IS CURRENTLY SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW IN THE HISTORY AND THEORY OF MODERNISM AT MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY, LONDON.

ABSTRACT This article addresses the confrontation between notions of kitsch and modernist ideas about "good design" that marked twentieth century debates. It examines the notion of "Gschnas" (frillery, fancy dress), an Austrian dialect term employed by Josef Frank and Adolf Loos. The complexities and sometimes contradictions of the positions of these two architect/designers are addressed in the context of more recent debates on kitsch. Frank's stance is examined as both a critique of orthodox inter-war modernism and as defining an alternative and more complex version of modernism that embraced (rather

than rejected) the decorative and the popular. Frank's interpretation of "Gschinas" is considered as an essential element of this wider and more generous vision of modernism, and the notion of a "modernist kitsch"—ostensibly a contradiction in terms—is assessed. Recent cultural analyses of kitsch typically examine this as a phenomenon of self-representation by members of social groups who do not belong to the professional art and design community, and do not live in houses or designed interiors commissioned from architects and designers. In contrast, by drawing on the writings and work of Frank and Loos who produced designs for both the middle classes and for the working-class clients of social housing, the relation between notions of kitsch and ideas of "good design" is examined with the aim of questioning accepted views about the opposition between modernist theory and practice and popular taste in the early twentieth century.



When the Austrian architect and designer Josef Frank furnished one of his outwardly sober pair of houses for the Weissenhofsiedlung model-housing exhibition (1927) in Stuttgart with exuberantly decorative textile designs and overstuffed sofas and daybeds, many of his fellow architects and critics were deeply shocked.¹ Paul Mellor, the irreverent young Hungarian site architect supervising the construction of a row of four austere terrace houses by the Dutch housing architect J. J. P. Oud, wrote boisterously back to his principal in Rotterdam of "Frank's brothel" (Kirsch 1989: 166). Werner Graeff, the recent Bauhaus graduate who acted as press officer for the Weissenhofsiedlung and its related design exhibitions, remembered Frank's houses as furnished in an "almost provocatively old-fashioned way" (Kirsch 1989: 166). In a review of the model-housing exhibition in a Dutch architectural magazine, the artist, designer, and editor of *De Stijl*, Theo van Doesburg, wrote of "femininely appointed interiors under French influence" (van Doesburg 1990: 172).²

The form of the modern domestic interior and the nature of the home were strongly contested in the late 1920s, linked to often conflicting and contradictory ideas about modernity and internationalism, homeland (*Heimat*), nation, class, and gender. The official name for the collective exhibitions and events organized by the German Werkbund in Stuttgart in 1927—of which the Weissenhofsiedlung was the most famous (and now the only generally remembered) manifestation—was "Die Wohnung," usually rendered into English as "The Dwelling," although also translated as "The Home."³ Some contemporary commentators and recent revisionist scholars have seen these exhibitions and events as assaults on the traditional values and comfortable appearance of "the home" (Friedman 1996: 190; Kirsch 1989: 199–201). Of the three posters used to

publicize the exhibition, two designed by the Stuttgart painter and graphic designer Willi Baumeister featured photographs of cluttered nineteenth-century interiors filled with bibelots and ornamental artifacts, canceled with a thick red cross and the slogan "wie wohnen?" (How to live?). A third poster by Karl Straub consisted of a montage of photographs of models of the estate and some of the interiors, emphasizing the whiteness, lightness, and clarity of the project in implied contrast to the darkness and profusion of decorative objects pilloried in Baumeister's posters (illustrated in Kirsch 1989: 19, 20).

As clever pieces of modernist graphic design and exemplary examples of the "neue Typografie," these posters set up deliberately polarized and exaggerated dichotomies between the "old" (cluttered nineteenth-century interiors in the two Baumeister posters) and the "new" (the montage of Weissenhof exteriors and interiors in Straub's poster). Some critics protested that the Baumeister posters depicted nineteenth-century interiors that nobody would have lived in by the mid-1920s (Kirsch 1989: 20). These fiercely argued debates can be seen as precursors of the intellectual climate that led to the discussions of kitsch as a cultural and social phenomenon from the 1930s (Adorno 1984; Broch 1969; Greenberg 1986).

"GSCHNAS" AND KITSCH

Frank was the only Austrian architect invited to contribute to the Weissenhofsiedlung. Adolf Loos had been excluded because of his hostile criticisms of the German Werkbund since shortly after its foundation in 1907.⁴ In the late 1920s and early 1930s hard-line modernists in Germany and Switzerland were prone to dismiss their Austrian colleagues as covertly (or sometimes openly) indulgent of a taste for schmaltzy decoration, hidden away behind superficially austere modernist exteriors. In one of the two Werkbund volumes published in association with the Stuttgart exhibitions in 1927, Frank rebutted criticisms of the interiors of his two model houses with a justification of furnishing exteriorly



"Liljevalchssofa:" Sofa designed by Frank in 1934, currently retailed as "Liljevalchssofa" (Liljevalch Sofa), upholstered in Mirakel (designed by Frank in the late 1920s). Photo courtesy Svenkst Tenn.

"Werkbundsiedlung House:"
The austere exterior of the house Frank designed for the Werkbundsiedlung, a model-housing exhibition which he directed, shown in Vienna in the summer of 1932. Photograph Paul Overy, 2005.



plain, almost minimalist white-walled interiors with comfortable sofas and daybeds, rather than cantilevered tubular-steel chairs; clashing, vibrant patterned textiles, rather than plain bleached cotton (1981a, 1982).

Frank gave his essay the tongue-twisting title "Der Gschnas fürs G'müt und der Gschnas als Problem" (Fancy Dress for the Soul and Fancy Dress as a Problem). "*Gschnas*" is an Austrian dialect word, meaning an indigestible mixture of poor quality food (Wintersberger with Artmann 1995: 36)—but variously translated in this context as frippery, flippancy, and fancy dress (Frank 1982, *passim*; Kirsch 1989: 167; Long 1996: 54, 2002: 108). More specifically, and perhaps originally, it was used of fancy dress worn at carnival time. This was the sense in which Loos had employed the term in one of his first articles attacking the misuse of ornament, published at the end of the nineteenth century (Loos 1997: 32). Loos dismissed an exhibited interior as a "*German Renaissance Gschnaszimmer*:" a derogatory term for the elaborately decorated *salons* of the upper-class and upper-middle class apartments on the Vienna Ringstrasse.⁵ In the 1982 English translation of Loos's essay "*Gschnaszimmer*" is left in the original German (1982: 93). In the 1998 version it appears as a "German renaissance room, seen in a modern light"—which misses Loos's pejorative, mocking use of the term (Loos 1998: 22). This usage cannot of course be unproblematically identified with modern notions of kitsch, but both Loos and Frank's employment of "*Gschnas*" seem to be in some way pertinent to later twentieth-century debates on the subject.

Frank had probably employed the term "Gschnas" in 1927 in response to a review by the Swiss critic Hans Bernoulli, who wrote that in Frank's house one "felt caressed in an atavistic but comfortable manner by cushions and myriad examples of Viennese Gschnas" (Bernoulli 1927: 265). Frank turns this around, using the term positively. For Frank "Gschnas" is the element that makes the domestic interior homely and habitable. Countering the hardline European modernists of the late 1920s who appropriated, oversimplified, and often misrepresented Loos's earlier arguments on ornament, luxury, and popular taste, he maintained that everyone had a certain need for "emotional satisfaction" or "sentimentality" (*Sentimentalität*)—a word which, like "Gschnas," Frank employed in a positive sense. He argued that ordinary working-class people needed "sentimentality" in their homes in order to be able to escape from the often repetitive and mechanical surroundings of their workplace.

Whereas most middle-class professionals found emotional satisfaction in or through their work, the working-class were generally not able to do this and sought it through their leisure environment and the decoration and furnishing of their homes. They needed to relax after a day's labor, to feel cosseted in clean and comfortable rooms surrounded by a plethora of ornament—which Frank defined as superfluous activity that "extends beyond the necessary," and which he argued signified rest and relaxation. "Gschnas," he claimed, provided people with a sense of well-being and comfort, in contrast to what he saw as the reductive interior aesthetic of the avant-garde intelligentsia, where "playful embellishment" was deemed unnecessary. He maintained that the demand for a minimalist bareness came particularly from those who lead the life of the mind ("those who think continuously") who could find comfort and rest through intellectual means and through the books and paintings that they owned. For this privileged minority the "playful embellishment" of ornament was unnecessary. (Frank 1981a: 189, 1982: 6).

Four years later in *Architektur als Symbol* (Architecture as Symbol), a fuller statement of his ideas published as a book (1931), Frank argued that the new architecture must be born "from the complete lack of taste of our age, from its confusion, its brilliant variety, and sentimentality, from everything that is alive and experienced fully; at last an art of the people, not an art for the people" (Frank 1981b: 188, my emphasis). He wrote that any truly vital creation must "incorporate everything that is alive today," encompassing "the whole spirit of the age, together with its sentimentality and its excesses, together with its tastelessness, which after all is at least alive" (171–2). In one of the first articles he published in Sweden (where he settled after emigrating from Austria in 1933–4) Frank dismissed design that was merely

"Wiederhoferhof 2a:"
Wiederhoferhof, Vienna, 1923–
24, a municipal housing block
designed by Frank, popularly
known as the 'Paprika House'
because of its color. Photograph
Paul Overy, 2004.



tasteful as boring, the product of a "bloodless aestheticism" (Frank 1934: 217).⁶ Later, in a passage not published in his lifetime, he rephrased the argument of his 1927 essay in terms of kitsch rather than "*Gschmas*:"

Every great work of art must border on kitsch. If people are so charmed by kitsch, then that at least is a genuine sentiment; they aren't putting on airs. The work of art must speak to this legitimate feeling and shape it into a meaningful form (quoted in translation in Czech 1991: 24).

An awareness of the symbiosis between kitsch and high art, between "*Gschmas*" and modern design, was to characterize theories of kitsch from the early 1930s onwards—although Frank's openness and lack of moral condemnation distinguishes his approach from that of writers on kitsch such as Theodor Adorno, Hermann Broch, and Clement Greenberg, and brings it closer to more recent commentators such as Sarat Maharaj (1992) and Victor Buchli (1998, 2000).

BAD TASTE AND KITSCH

Apparently introduced as commercial slang in the Munich art markets during the 1860s and 1870s (Calinescu 1987: 234), kitsch seems to have been first employed as an international term between the wars—although it was clearly in use in its current sense in Germany at the time of the First World War.⁷ Frank Wedekind

wrote an unfinished play entitled *Kitsch* in early 1917, which was published posthumously in March 1918 together with his notes.⁸ The development of the concept of kitsch is clearly connected to preoccupations with the phenomenon of "bad taste" (or "vulgarity") that date back to the mid-nineteenth century, and which are closely linked to the process of industrialization and modernization.⁹ A museum devoted to "badly designed" artifacts, or objects considered to be in "bad taste," was opened in London as a direct outcome of the Great Exhibition of 1851 which had been organized with the aim of improving the design of industrially manufactured products in Britain. In 1906 the Landesgewerbemuseum (Regional Applied Art Museum) in Baden-Württemberg started a collection of "bad taste," and in 1909 published a catalogue of "errors of taste," the *Katalog der Geschmacks-Verirrungen* (Schweiger 1990: 251, note 532).¹⁰

Yet kitsch cannot simply be equated with the notion of bad taste, although the two concepts are closely related. Matei Calinescu argues that "we are dealing with one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics" (1987: 232). It is a concept of Laocoon-like complexity that forms one of the "Five Faces Of Modernity" Calinescu addresses: modernism, avant-garde, decadence, kitsch, postmodernism. Most writers on the subject link kitsch to the development of the avant-garde and modernism, seeing these as linked in antithesis or symbiosis. Writing in *Partisan Review* in 1939, Greenberg associates kitsch with the rise of the avant-garde—both products of a fragmented modern industrial culture. Greenberg sees kitsch as the "other face" (or obverse) of the avant-garde, and defines it largely in terms of Nazi, Fascist, and Stalinist totalitarian art (Greenberg 1986). It is this section of Greenberg's essay that Gillo Dorfles reprinted in his well-known anthology of writings on kitsch, illustrating the extract largely with examples of these three varieties of totalitarian art (Greenberg in Dorfles 1969: 116–26).

In a letter to Dwight Macdonald written in February 1939 while he was working on his essay, Greenberg argued that kitsch was the effluent from the high art of the ruling class: "There is a constant seepage from top to bottom, and Kitsch (a wonderful German word that covers all this crap) is the common sewer."¹¹ Most of the major texts on the subject from the 1930s to the last decades of the twentieth century continue to purvey negative definitions of kitsch—among the more recent those by writers who were formed under Stalinist and post-Stalinist East European regimes (Kulka 1996; Kundera, 1984). Yet the introduction by people into their homes of kinds of artifacts often dismissed as kitsch can also be seen as a system of resistance to the totalitarian state. As an example of this Victor Buchli has demonstrated how Soviet citizens furnished their apartments and lived their domestic lives in Moisei

Ginzburg and Ignatii Milinis's Narkomfin communal housing block in Moscow in the decades that followed its completion in 1930 (Buchli 1998, 2000).

"GSCHNAS" AND THE HOME

Frank believed that working-class tenants were entitled to enjoy the comforts of decoration, rather than be puritanically denied this—as was customary in much publicly provided social housing of the period, often as much for ideological as financial reasons. He was critical of what he saw as excessively functionalist developments in Germany and attacked these in a paper delivered at the 1930 Werkbund congress held in Vienna, which was attended by architects from Germany including Gropius and Mies van der Rohe (Frank 1930). Frank was closely involved with the Social Democrats in Vienna who controlled the city council from 1919 to 1934, and made "*das rote Wien*" (Red Vienna) an island of social-democratic power within a right-wing Christian Democrat Austria. He was a prolific designer of social housing during these years—initially single-family row houses with gardens for the "settlers" organizations which had developed from the self-build and self-help movements active in Vienna during the crisis years following the break up of the Austro-Hungarian empire after the First World War.¹²

Despite his continued belief that individual houses with gardens were a better solution to the housing problem than multistory walk-up apartments in the inner city, Frank also designed a series of well-planned, plain, unornamented three- or four-story municipal social-housing blocks (*Gemeindebauten*) for the Vienna municipal housing department. He attacked the pompous pretensions and elephantine proportions of many of the early *Gemeindebauten*, their exteriors concealing cramped and badly designed apartments behind facades heavily and wastefully ornamented with socialist and populist symbols (Frank 1926)—which he dismissed scornfully as "proletarian style" (Frank 1981b: 115–17). Frank believed ornamentation was for the private interior not the public facade, and that the application of a "proletarian style" of public exterior ornament to the exteriors of *Gemeindebauten* was an inappropriate form of "fancy dress." At the turn of the century Loos had similarly ridiculed the pretentious ornamented facades of late nineteenth-century apartment buildings in Vienna, designed to make multi-tenanted middle-class rental blocks appear like renaissance or baroque aristocratic palaces—dubbing them "The Potemkin City" (Loos 2002: 26–8).¹³ The stretch of the outer ring road known as the Margaretengürtel was nicknamed "the Ringstrasse of the Proletariat" because of the enormous size and grandiose ornamentation of the *Gemeindebauten* built along it.¹⁴ For Frank the independent socialist, the Social Democrats

who controlled Red Vienna had a taste for public and populist ornament that sometimes came close to that of the totalitarian dictators.

Like many radical designers before him such as William Morris, Frank found it necessary to work for middle-class clients to make a living. In Vienna in the mid-1920s he formed an interior design company with his architectural partner Oskar Wlach called "Haus & Garten" (House and Garden), with a showroom in the city center. Later in Stockholm he found himself unable to practice as an architect and worked as a designer for Svenskt Tenn, a firm that catered for an exclusive upper-middle class clientele.¹⁶ Frank seems to have had little or no political involvement in Sweden, where he had emigrated after the Nazis came to power in Germany and the Social Democrats were brutally defeated in Vienna (foreseeing the *Anschluss* of 1938 and the Nazification of Austria).¹⁷ His designs became associated with luxury and privilege and were attacked by many on the left within the Swedish modern movement (Sparke 1996). Yet his work and presence in Stockholm after 1934 was one of the main inspirations for "Swedish modern," the comfortable and relaxed eclectic modernist style that was to become internationally popular—particularly in Britain and the United States—during the immediate post-Second World War period (Sparke 1996; Wängberg-Eriksson 1996b). This and its local derivatives, often known as "soft modernism," were condemned and rejected by the "brutalist" generation of postwar architects and their critical champions.¹⁸ Frank's work in Sweden is also seen as one of the major influences on the approach to design of the hugely successful IKEA cut-price furniture superstores, which from modest beginnings in Sweden had become a multinational operation by the end of the twentieth century.¹⁹

In the early 1920s Frank had designed elegant and refined "reform furniture" (*Reformmöbel*) for the settlers' organizations based on Austrian Biedermeier and English Arts-and-Crafts models, although little of this seems to have been sold—probably because it was too expensive.²⁰ In 1923 he published drawings of interiors accompanying a design for an unrealized *Siedlung* in Klosterneuberg, a small town just to the north of Vienna. These showed bright well-lit rooms furnished with lightweight "reform" pieces, potted plants, and a grand piano(!)—plain but comfortable interiors that look forward to the styles of the 1950s and incorporated a certain utopian element.²¹ (Better-off working-class- or lower-middle-class families might well have traditionally had a piano in their salon or front parlor. But it would have been an upright rather than a grand piano, and it is difficult to imagine there being room enough to accommodate a grand piano in the often tiny settlers' *Siedlung* houses.) Frank claimed such drawings were just a suggestion of how the *Siedlung* house might be furnished. They were intended

to demonstrate how working-class and lower-middle-class tenants could enjoy the maximum of “bourgeois culture,” to which he believed they were entitled. The architect or designer should not attempt to dictate how people might live or what pieces they ought to buy—a position similar to that taken by Loos, especially after the First World War.

Both Loos and Frank were opposed to the design of furniture that rejected traditional forms, arguing that design should be based on the evolution of well-tried models to modern needs, and should not strive to produce completely new forms dictated by the properties of “new” materials such as tubular steel. Frank’s furniture designed for Haus & Garten was eclectic and yet rigorous, based on a modern interpretation of vernacular designs, lightweight, elegant, yet completely unpretentious—although custom-made and therefore expensive. He also designed model rooms for a number of displays organized by the municipality to demonstrate arrangements of inexpensive modern furniture of the kind that would fit easily into the new *Gemeindebauten*. For the exhibition *Wien und die Wiener* (Vienna and the Viennese) he assembled off-the-peg pieces of furniture from a variety of sources, grouped together informally, and standing free from the plain-painted walls, accompanied by simple colorful textiles in bold patterns and bright patterns.²²

Frank was the most outspoken and talented of the generation of Austrian architect/designers that followed Loos. He almost certainly developed his ideas in response to, as much as in reaction against, those of Loos. By the mid-1920s Loos seems to have come to share Frank’s beliefs that intellectuals and artists could learn from working-class aesthetic values—perhaps as the result of his experience as chief architect to the Vienna Siedlungsamt (Settlement Office) from 1921 to 1924, where he had been responsible for overseeing the design of *Siedlungen* for the settlers’ movement.²³ In 1924 he argued that a “home should never be finished:”

It is ridiculous to specify where people should put a thing, to organize everything for them from the lavatory to the ashtray. On the contrary: I love it when people arrange their furniture as they (not I!) need, and I find it completely natural and approve wholeheartedly if they bring in their old paintings, their beloved memories, be these things tasteful or tasteless. It matters little to me anyway. But for them they are sensitive fragments of life, of familiar intimacy (Loos 1988: 141).

At the turn of the century Loos had opposed the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (or total design) that Secessionist architects and designers such as Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser provided for their clients, influenced by the ideas and ideals of William

Morris and the English Arts-and-Crafts movement (Loos 2002: 48–52). Here every detail was carefully coordinated to produce a matching ensemble—sometimes including the dresses of the female members of the client's family, designed to harmonize with the furnishings. Loos, on the other hand, had argued that people should be free to choose their own furniture and the artifacts with which they filled their homes, encouraging them to use inherited pieces, or pieces they had acquired earlier so that the interior ensemble represented a joint and cumulative history. And in his earlier middle-class interior designs he encouraged his clients to buy their own furniture or to bring in artifacts, artworks, and heirlooms—even though these might offend against his own canons of good taste.

In an article of 1898 Loos cited his experience of growing up in an artisanal household in the Hapsburg provinces in the 1870s (his father was a German-speaking master mason in the Moravian industrial city of Brno) as an example of this organic, familial accretion of "sentimental" objects and artifacts:

Every piece of furniture, every object, every thing had a story to tell, the story of our family. Our home was never finished; it developed with us, and we with it. It was certainly without "style;" that is, it had no alien, no old "style." But it did have a style, the style of its occupants, the style of our family (Loos 1998: 58).

Despite his belief that a new aristocratic elite of modern individuals capable of dispensing with ornament would usher in a new plainer style, Loos had never totally rejected the values of the skilled artisan class from which he himself came. But he felt ambivalent about the contemporary Viennese craftsman. On the one hand, he pitied and patronized his shoemaker who was unable to abandon elaborately brogued decoration on the handmade shoes he produced (Loos 1998: 174). On the other hand, he praised his furniture maker Josef Vellich (Loos 2002: 184–9), or the skilled craftsmen who produced the "anonymously designed" unornamented (male) accessories, leatherwork, and silverwork for the upper-middle-class luxury trade which he admired and cited as models of the modern move away from ornament (Loos 1998: 32–3, 164).

ORNAMENT AND KITSCH

To complicate matters Loos shifted his position in his later writings after the First World War years, and his ideas are frequently inconsistent and occasionally contradictory even in writings of the same period. Since the late 1890s he had argued that ornament was disappearing from modern life and modern artifacts, and indeed had done for a hundred years—at least among those who accepted

(or were in a position to accept) modernity. These formed a new elite of consumers of austere luxury artifacts made by skilled craftsmen—an elite which in the final decades of the Austro-Hungarian empire was taking over power from the old imperial aristocracy.

Loos related the high-quality artifacts that he saw as representative of this shift away from decoration to traditional trades and skills that had been practiced in imperial Vienna for centuries, but also to imported luxury articles such as English men's tailoring and accessories. He contrasted this "elite" taste with that of those who still found ornament necessary: "primitive" Papuans and Africans, female peasants from the subaltern regions of the empire ("Slovak farmers' wives"), and those artisans who had not been able to free their products from the ornamentality of the past—such as the Viennese shoemaker who made his brogue shoes (Loos 1998: 174). Along with the designers of the Vienna Secession these, for Loos, were the producers and consumers of a vulgar and debased ornament—a categorization that has certain similarities to Broch's characterization of what he termed the *Kitschmensch* (literally "kitsch man"): the producer and consumer of kitsch—an idea taken up and developed by Ludwig Giesz (Broch 1969: 49; Giesz 1969: 156–74).²⁴

Loos had allowed that ornament remained necessary for those who had not had the benefit of education and an exposure to the "peaks" of Western European culture, as an essential part of their lives in the absence of more profound cultural stimulation (Loos 1998: 174–5):

After all the toil and tribulations of the day, we can go to hear Beethoven or Tristan. My shoemaker cannot. I must not take away his religion from him, for I have nothing to put in its place (p. 175).

Loos claimed the reduction in decoration that had taken place in the accoutrements, artifacts, and furnishings of the educated middle classes during the Biedermeier period of the early nineteenth century in Austria and Germany had made possible the highest achievements of modern culture:

The disappearance of ornament has brought about an undreamed-of blossoming in the other arts. Beethoven's symphonies would never have been written by a man who had to dress in silk, velvet, and lace (p. 175).

Frank's view of culture is more skeptical and less elitist than that of Loos (even in his writings of after the First World War). Frank's remarks on the lack of a need for "playful embellishment" on the part of the cultured and educated middle classes are less self-

congratulatory. He does not have Loos's certainty that this class is the evolved elite, or modern aristocracy—and by definition to be revered. Hence "playful embellishment" also had an important part in the interiors Frank designed for his cultivated middle-class clients in Austria until 1933–4, and subsequently in Sweden. It is clear that he believed that they too would benefit from an exposure in their own homes to an exuberant decoration that derived much of its strength and vitality from an awareness and observation of the way less well-off and well-educated people "mixed and matched" different ornaments and decorated artifacts in their domestic environments. This is what he characterized as "*Gschnas*" in his early writings. This cannot be considered identical with kitsch, although it could be seen as related to it and bearing closely upon it. Frank's own exuberantly ornamental textile designs, derived from classical, far-eastern, and popular sources, are not examples of kitsch. Yet they clearly depend for their vitality, exuberance—and, I would argue, their success—on an open-minded and imaginative engagement with what Frank defined as "*Gschnas*."

EPILOGUE: MODERNIST KITSCH

Around 1922 Theo van Doesburg had described the Weimar Bauhaus as "a square on the outside, Biedermeier on the inside" (Fiedler and Feierabend 2000: 30). Van Doesburg employed the term Biedermeier in a similarly disparaging sense as "feminine" and "French" in his review of the Weissenhofsiedlung quoted earlier. Biedermeier was widely seen as a domestic style perfectly embodying the values of the newly empowered central European bourgeoisie, and had been praised by Loos in his early articles as a style whose simplicity had enabled the new elite to rise to new heights of political and artistic expression. For most 1920s modernists like van Doesburg, however, Biedermeier implied the cluttered nineteenth-century past caricatured in Baumeister's posters for the Weissenhofsiedlung. In the late 1920s both Loos and Frank—and van Doesburg in the studio designed for himself and his wife Nelly van Doesburg at Meudon near Paris—produced cubic buildings that were square (or rectangular) on the outside. Van Doesburg might well have regarded the inside of both Loos's Moller house and Frank's Beer house in Vienna as "square on the outside and Biedermeier on the inside"—in contrast to the interior of his Meudon studio, or the Rietveld Schröder House, often regarded as the most "authentic" example of a De Stijl interior and one of the icons of modernist architecture.

Towards the end of the twentieth century in a lecture delivered at the Technical University of Delft in 1990, the contemporary Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas dismissed the Schröder House as "the most sublimated version of the gypsy caravan:"

You can see the Schröder House as sublime, but you can also read it as an overfull 17th century genre piece. For the Schröder House is full. Full of discoveries, full of intentions big and small, full of wishes, full of things, full of color or at least paint; it is full of abstracted odds and sublimated ends, the garden seat, the teapot, the spoons, the lamps (Koolhaas 1999: 162).

Koolhaas had visited the Schröder House while its client Truus Schröder, who collaborated with Rietveld on the design of the interior, was still living there at the end of her long life in a modernist environment that also included personal bric-a-brac and bibelots (Friedman with Casciato 1998; Overy *et al.* 1988). (Schröder lived in the house for sixty years until her death in 1985 at the age of 95.) For Koolhaas a lifetime's accretions of personalia—or *Sentimentalität*, to use Frank's term—seems to have obscured the early clarity of the design. But it was, of course, precisely this accumulation that gave the house its human, cozy, lived-in, quality.

Koolhaas compared the Schröder House with Mies van der Rohe's houses "where voluptuous sofas lie beside sandblasted windows, where obscene red plush curtains hang next to onyx." This is hardly to compare like with like, contrasting as he does the "lived-in" Schröder House he visited towards the end of Schröder's life with what reads like a description of the photographs taken in the Tugendhat House (1930) in Brno when the Tugendhat family had only lived there for a few years (Hammer-Tugendhat and Tegethoff 2000).²⁵ Nevertheless his reference to Mies's design, with its voluptuous sofas, "obscene" red plush curtains, and onyx partition walls, is as much an evocation of a notion of "modernist kitsch" as is his characterization of the Schröder House as a "sublimated version of a gypsy caravan." Only unwittingly does Koolhaas acknowledge that kitsch and modernism are entwined in a symbiotic relationship. The key perhaps lies in Frank's concept of "*Gschmas*," which encourages us to consider the ways manifestations of kitsch might form an intrinsic part of—rather than a contrast to, or aberration of—modernist design.

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NOTES

1. The Weissenhofsiedlung was the first comprehensive international public display of interwar modernist architecture, and is commonly considered to be the first major collective statement of the plain unornamented style that has come to be

associated with modernism. For a recent comprehensive review of modernism in architecture and design as generally defined, see the publication that accompanied the exhibition *Modernism: Designing a New World*, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, from April 6 to July 23 2006 (Wilk 2006).

2. Organized by the German Werkbund as a demonstration of types for modern housing, the Weissenhofsiedlung was on display during the summer of 1927. Fifty-three dwellings—mainly single-family houses, detached, semi-detached, or in short rows, with some apartments in two low-rise blocks—were commissioned under the “artistic direction” of Mies van der Rohe from fifteen Western European architects, the majority of whom were German. These were exhibited prior to being occupied, many furnished as “show” houses or apartments, accompanied by a series of temporary exhibitions of modern architecture and design shown in several venues in Stuttgart. These included a photographic exhibition of modern architecture in Europe and America, and displays of furniture, kitchen designs, and new materials for building construction and domestic interiors (Kirsch 1989; Pommer and Otto 1991).
3. In the English version of one of the two major studies of Weissenhof, “Die Wohnung” is translated as “The Home” (Kirsch 1989). The exhibitions and related displays and events have now generally become known collectively as the Weissenhof or Weissenhofsiedlung exhibition.
4. See, for example, “Cultural Degeneration” (1908), translated in Loos (1998: 163–6).
5. This was a reference to the “Gschnasfest,” a carnival ball celebrated for the first time in 1870 when numerous Viennese artists had collaborated on large set decorations (Loos 1982: 141, note 3).
6. “We can easily avoid every touch of tastelessness if we restrict ourselves to a bloodless aestheticism and suppress all expression of sentiment. But then what is tasteful will become hopelessly boring” (quoted in English translation in Wängberg-Eriksson 1996a: 66–7).
7. For the etymology of kitsch, see Calinescu (1987: 232–7) and Dorfles (1969: 3).
8. Wedekind argued in his notes that “Kitsch is the contemporary form of the Gothic, Rococo, Baroque” (Wedekind 1924: 210, quoted in translation, Calinescu 1987: 225). “Baroque” was used shortly afterwards by van Doesburg as the antithesis of the purified modernism he campaigned for in the pages of *De Stijl* (van Doesburg 1920).
9. Broch and Calinescu also link kitsch to the rise of the romantic movement (Broch 1969: 49–67, 72–5; Calinescu 1987: 237–40.)

10. According to Adolf Loos's third wife Claire Loos-Beck, while she and Loos were on a visit to Germany in the late 1920s he instructed his housekeeper in Vienna to pack up and send a set of black glasses designed by Josef Hoffmann—whose work for the Vienna Werkstätte Loos particularly deplored—so that he could present these to the museum for its collection of “bad taste” (Loos, C. 1985: 105).
11. Quoted by John O'Brian in “Introduction” to Greenberg (1986: xxii).
12. In addition to Frank, both Loos and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (later to become known as the designer of the Frankfurt Kitchen) worked for the settlers' organizations in Vienna during the early 1920s. For the settlers' movement and Viennese housing immediately after the First World War, see Blau (1999: 84–102).
13. Grigori Aleksandrovich Potemkin, Catherine the Great's favorite and military commander, is said to have erected imitation villages of cardboard and canvas in the newly annexed Crimea to impress the empress with the region's prosperity on her tour there in 1787.
14. The outer ring road or Gürtel (belt) was the second of the ring roads built in Vienna in the nineteenth century. The Ringstrasse had been constructed on the site of the *Glacis*, the defensive circle of open land immediately around the city walls, and defined and enclosed the old city. The slightly later Gürtel followed the outer circle of the former defenses, running through the largely proletarian inner suburbs.
15. Frank admired Morris and was influenced by him in his own textile designs, which are often based on stylized plant forms. For Frank's textile designs see Wängberg-Eriksson (1996b, 1999).
16. It has been suggested that anti-Semitism in the Swedish architectural profession at the time may have prevented Frank from being accepted in architectural circles in Stockholm. Kristina Wängberg-Eriksson argues that it would have been “problematic” for a “Jewish immigrant” to have practiced as an architect in Sweden between the wars (Wängberg-Eriksson 1996a: 64). Frank's relatively few realized designs for villas in Sweden were for friends or relatives of his Swedish wife—either built in the 1920s while he was still practicing in Austria, or shortly after he emigrated to Stockholm.
17. As early as 1933 the architects Clemens Holzmeister and Josef Hoffmann had ceded from the Austrian Werkbund (of which Frank was joint vice-president with Hoffmann), forming a “new Werkbund” sympathetic to the Austrofascists (who were to take control of the country in 1934) in opposition to

the "Jewish" Werkbund of Frank and his social democratic colleagues (see Sekler 1965: 67–70).

18. The word "brutalism" had been coined in Sweden and was taken up by English architects in the early 1950s, and by critics such as Reyner Banham (Frampton 1985: 262).
19. "Reverberations of Frank's design ideas can be seen in a surprisingly large number of products sold by IKEA and other Scandinavian interior furnishings firms, which now export their products to countries around the globe" (Wängberg-Eriksson 1996b: 152).
20. Frank's reform furniture was illustrated in Frank (1923), reproduced in Long (2002: 72, Figs 62–4).
21. Illustrated in Long (2002: 72, Figs 62–4).
22. Illustrated in Long (2002: 167, Fig. 156). Other similar exhibitions in which Frank was involved included *Das neue Wien* (The New Vienna) and *Der gute billige Gegenstand* (The Good Inexpensive Object), which he organized for the Austrian Werkbund.
23. Loos had resigned because of the lack of support from the municipal authorities for the *Siedlung* movement (Blau 1999: 99; see also Allmeyer-Beck et al. 1993: 12; Long 2002: 75). He is often mistakenly described as having been city architect, or chief housing architect of Vienna. Although Loos's role was important at a time when the *Siedlungen* built for and by the settlers' movement were making a major contribution to social housing in the city, his position was severely circumscribed and he had little direct power.
24. However Loos's critique of ornament cannot be unproblematically collapsed into an attack on kitsch, as it is for instance by Miriam Gusevich (1988).
25. The Tugendhats, who were Jewish, left Czechoslovakia when the Germans invaded in 1938. Koolhaas (born 1944) cannot have visited it in anything like its original state.

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